

BACKGROUNDER

LIFE AS A NINTENDO GAME COUNSELOR

"Playing Games For a Living"

"The satisfaction in the job is in knowing that you make people feel good by helping them finish the games," says Blaine Phelps. "We can make games enjoyable instead of frustrating for players that are stuck at a certain spot, or who just want to enhance game play," adds Steve Pennington.

Blaine and Steve are Nintendo® game counselors, a skilled force of 140 video game-play experts who answer more than 50,000 calls per week from information-hungry Nintendo® fans from all over the country. These Nintendo enthusiasts, who "work" by playing video games eight hours a day, range in age from 18 to 52. "There are two types of counselors," says Steve. "The ones under 20 years old are still kids playing games. The ones over 20 years old are adults who play the games to recapture the fun of being a kid."

According to Blaine, the requirements for becoming a game counselor are rigorous. For instance, prospective counselors have to complete at least two out of Nintendo's five top games. They are also given only five days to finish "The Legend of Zelda."™

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Nintendo Game Counselor
2-2-2-2-2

But even though they have the "insider's" perspective, game counselors never give away a game's ending when they finally do get on the phones. "We don't want to steal the challenge," comments Blaine. Steve has discovered that most callers already have the skills to finish a game; they simply need to be guided through some of the tough spots.

As a result of their one-on-one contact with customers, Nintendo's game counselors are among the first to discover trends in video game play -- from changing game preferences to changing players demographics. "You may not think that anyone but kids would call the hotline," says Steve. "But I've talked to lawyers, CEO's and all sorts of other people. The strategy games seem to appeal to an older audience. We also have a lot of parents calling, not to get tips for their kids, but for themselves." "We're also seeing more calls from girls and women," observes Blaine. "I get calls from mothers asking about games for their daughters."

Both game counselors acknowledge that playing video games has positive value beyond entertainment. "To the kids that I talk to, Nintendo is something they can do to be competitive with, if not better at than adults," comments Steve. "Sometimes kids feel their lives are controlled by everyone else. Video game play is an area where a kid can show his or her expertise and feel in control."

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Nintendo Game Counselor
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Steve also explains that there are important reasons for families to play together. "Video games can be a positive, binding force for a family. They let parents and kids share common ground and a common frame of reference."

Blaine and Steve are both game counselor supervisors at Nintendo's Redmond, Washington-based headquarters. In that position, Blaine studies new games and develops strategy tips for other game counselors to use in helping hotline callers advance to more difficult levels. He is also involved in product analysis, where he carefully helps edit the text used in each new game. "I have always loved playing video games," he says. "My job lets me see the development of some of my favorite games from their inception and even gives me the opportunity to help improve them."

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Nintendo Game Counselor
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Steve is responsible for monitoring a team of game counselors and making sure the information they give to consumers is accurate. Like Blaine, he helps analyze new product, edits game text and searches for clues to pass on to his callers. "When I first started as a game counselor, it was hard to believe I was getting paid to play games all day." Steve says, "I really enjoy talking to other enthusiastic players, and it's great to know I can help them have just as much fun with Nintendo games as I do."

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For more information:

Richard Lindner
or Lynne Gray
HILL AND KNOWLTON INC.
213/937-7460